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Cuban Support for Nationalist
Movements and Revolutionary Groups

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Memorandum**

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CUBAN SUPPORT FOR NATIONALIST MOVEMENTS AND REVOLUTIONARY GROUPS *

SUMMARY

During the past several years, the Cuban government has provided only very limited and selective support for Latin American revolutionary groups.

- There has been no evidence of Cubans operating with any insurgent group since 1971.
- There has been no evidence of Cuba supplying any rebel group with arms or ammunition in the last few years.
- Cuban training in guerrilla methods and tactics continues at a modest level, but there is no indication that this has increased significantly and we do not expect it to.
- There have been only two reports in the last year of Cuban-trained guerrillas leaving the island, ostensibly to return to their native land.
- Cuba has provided limited financial assistance to some groups, but most have been forced to rely upon other means to meet the bulk of their financial requirements.

Cuban assistance to such organizations seems designed principally to maintain contacts and, in some cases, to keep the groups alive. Cuban policy has turned toward channeling assistance to local Communist parties and encouraging broad alliances of "progressive" political groups. In Latin America, Havana has concentrated on:

- building diplomatic ties and participating in regional and sub-regional economic organizations; and
- providing technical assistance and/or limited military training to a few left-leaning governments, e.g., Guyana and Jamaica.

* This memorandum was prepared by [] of CIA's Office of Regional and Political Analysis and was coordinated by the Office of Economic Research, Office of Strategic Research, and the Clandestine Service. It has been reviewed at the working level by INR in the Department of State, DIA in the Department of Defense, and the National Security Agency, which concur.

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Cuban support for national liberation movements in Africa is of a different genre, since in recent years it has been directed against colonial regimes and white-minority governments in Rhodesia and Namibia which are opposed by all independent black African states.

Cuban aid to Angola's governing MPLA is a special case which:

- began as support for an anticolonial nationalist movement operating against the Portuguese,
- later supported the MPLA against rival nationalist movements and other foreign intervention as Neto seized power in Luanda following the collapse of Portuguese resistance, and
- finally became primarily a counterinsurgency effort against continuing guerrilla operations by three nationalist groups that survived the MPLA's assumption of power from the Portuguese.

The South African invasion of late October 1975 hastened the recognition of the MPLA government by other African states, thus somewhat belatedly but conveniently lending some substance to Cuban claims that the dispatch of combat troops was in response to a request from a legitimate government.

As in Latin America, the Cubans have emphasized development of diplomatic relations with African states and assistance to politically sympathetic governments. There is little or no evidence that the Cubans are directly supporting subversion against established black African regimes.

In the Middle East, Cuba has provided token assistance to Palestinian nationalist groups. Reports that Cubans are training the Algerian-backed Polisario movement in the Western Sahara remain unconfirmed.

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DISCUSSION

Background

1. Fidel Castro has been involved in subversion and armed struggle since 1947. Almost every Latin American country has felt his interference at least once. His involvement has ranged from personal participation in an expedition launched against dictator Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic in 1947 to sending Cuban combatants to operate with insurgent groups in Guatemala, Venezuela, and Bolivia. Castro's foreign policy is strongly influenced by his perception of Cuba as the first country in Latin America to be liberated from imperialism and of himself as the individual chiefly responsible for that achievement. Therefore, Castro views himself and Cuba as pathfinders for the "liberation" of Third World nations.

2. In the early and mid-1960s Castro attempted to employ—on a massive scale in Latin America and a more limited scale in Africa—the same tactics that had brought his success in Cuba. Havana became the center for subversive operations against other Latin American countries. Cuban support—including money, weapons, training, propaganda, and Cuban personnel—was provided to revolutionary groups in Venezuela, Colombia, Peru, Brazil, Paraguay, Bolivia, Uruguay, Chile, Argentina, Central America, and the Caribbean. During this period at least 2,500 Latin Americans received guerrilla warfare training and political indoctrination in Cuba. With the single exception of his struggle in Cuba, however, Castro's revolutionary efforts in Latin America have amounted to an unbroken string of failures.

3. Castro's subversive activities were not confined to Latin America; he became involved with revolutionary movements in Africa in 1961 when the Cubans extended limited guerrilla warfare training to a few African extremist groups. Links were established with guerrilla organizations in Angola, Portuguese Guinea, Cameroon, Congo (Leopoldville), Rhodesia, Zanzibar, Ethiopia, and Mozambique. Over 200 Cuban military advisers, led by Che Guevara, trained and assisted the Congolese rebels in the Congo rebellion during the mid-1960s. Some of the Cubans became involved in

the fighting as combatants. Diplomatic relations were established with Algeria, Congo (Brazzaville), Ghana, Tanganyika (later Tanzania) and Guinea which served as centers for Cuban activities in the region.

4. The Tricontinental Conference, held in Havana in late January 1966, was an effort by Castro to assume a major role in the leadership of revolutionary movements throughout the world. The conference was attended by more than 500 delegates and resulted in the formation of the African-Asian-Latin American Peoples Solidarity Organization (AALAPSO). This body was created to coordinate the activities of all antiimperialist rebel movements. Havana was designated as the location of the organization's headquarters and a Cuban was appointed AALAPSO Secretary General. At the conclusion of the conference, Cuba sponsored the formation of the Latin American Solidarity Organization (LASO) with headquarters also in Havana. Controlled by Cubans, it was designed to act as a support mechanism for Latin American guerrilla groups.

5. During the latter part of the 1960s, however, the Cubans experienced a series of setbacks. Guevara's effort to organize a revolutionary offensive in Africa failed and he returned to Cuba in 1966. In 1968, most Cuban advisers in Congo (Brazzaville) were expelled. Similar reversals occurred in Latin America. In May 1967 four Cuban military officers were captured by Venezuelan security forces as they attempted to infiltrate into Venezuela. The four officers were brought to the infiltration point by a Cuban fishing vessel. The impact of this reversal was compounded in October 1967 with the liquidation of Guevara's band of guerrillas in Bolivia. His failure was a particularly disastrous setback because the nucleus of the group consisted of 16 veteran Cuban combatants; three were members of the Cuban Communist Party's Central Committee. The group was theoretically the best team that Havana could field.

6. The Guevara fiasco is generally seen as a watershed in Cuba's foreign policy, but it was not the only factor that influenced Castro's decision to alter his tactics. He was experiencing strong pressure from

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the USSR to abandon guerrilla movements and cooperate with local Communist parties. Cuba was virtually isolated from the rest of the hemisphere and the Cuban economy was experiencing serious problems. Consequently, in 1968 Castro began to disengage from the guerrilla groups and improve his ties with Communist parties in Latin America. At the same time he sought to establish government-to-government contacts with "progressive" countries in Latin America and elsewhere.

7. The process of disengagement provoked complaints from leaders of guerrilla movements in Venezuela and Colombia. Castro responded with a bitter attack on his critics, stating that true revolutionaries willing to fight and die could always count on Cuba's assistance, but pseudorevolutionaries who fumbled away opportunities would get nothing. Fidel's break from large-scale support of violent revolution was neither quick nor clean. He was impressed by the headline-grabbing exploits of the Tupamaros in Uruguay and Carlos Marighella in Brazil, and for a short period espoused and promoted urban terrorism. This too was deemphasized, however, following the death or capture of important pro-Cuban rebel leaders in Bolivia, Brazil, Nicaragua, Haiti, and Panama in late 1969 and 1970.

8. To project a more respectable image, Havana began a gradual expansion of cultural, sports, and technical exchanges with other nations. The Cubans attended an increasing number of international meetings and conferences. Economic, medical, and technical assistance became a standard Cuban offering to underdeveloped nations in Africa and the Caribbean; trade ties and eventually diplomatic relations followed. The new policy achieved rapid success. The Cuban government now has diplomatic relations with 11 Latin American and 34 African nations.

The Current Picture: Overview

9. The Cuban government is still providing limited support to a variety of revolutionary and terrorist groups, but, based on an exhaustive search of relevant reporting, we believe that the level of assistance is negligible compared to Castro's revolutionary offensive of the 1960s. Havana is probably in contact with most of the remaining guerrilla movements in Latin America, but there has been no evidence of direct Cuban participation with an active guerrilla force since early 1971. Training in guerrilla methods and terrorist tactics in Cuba is continuing, but at a reduced level. Propaganda support does not compare with the

vitriolic hyperbole of the past. The two Cuban-created revolutionary support organizations, LASO and AALAPSO, have been allowed to wither. Partly because of Havana's reduced support and partly because of their own desire to function independently, the revolutionary groups still in existence have acquired necessary arms and funds by robberies and kidnappings.

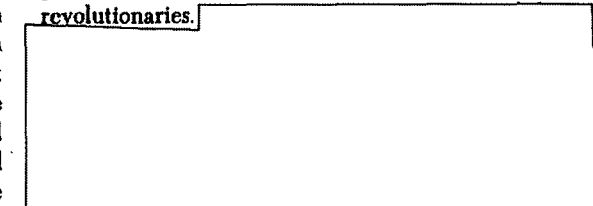
10. At the same time, Havana's expanded diplomatic activity has provided greater opportunities for several types of intelligence and political action. Cuban intelligence officers in diplomatic guise are present in relatively large numbers in the countries where Havana is officially represented. There and elsewhere, the Cuban news agency, national airline, and fishing fleet are used as covers for agents. In contrast to earlier years, however, when the emphasis was on supporting armed subversion, the activities of the Cuban intelligence service now appear to be largely confined to espionage and promoting Cuban interests both overtly and clandestinely among legally constituted groups, such as student and labor organizations.

The Current Picture: Latin America

Chile

11. Despite Havana's success in establishing formal diplomatic ties with many governments in Latin America, Castro retains deep antipathy toward several regimes. His strongest enmity is reserved for the military government of Chile. After the overthrow of the Allende government in September 1973, Castro promised the antijunta Chileans "all the aid in Cuba's power to provide." The divisions within the Chilean left, however, have forestalled any significant Cuban operations against the Pinochet regime.

12. So far, Havana has given limited support to the Chilean revolutionaries. There is little doubt that the Cubans maintain contact with most of the antijunta groups. For example, a delegation from the United Popular Action Group (MAPU) arrived in Havana on 11 April to meet with Cuban officials. In the last two years, however, there has been only one report that provides evidence of material support for Chilean revolutionaries.



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13. Other reporting indicates that the Cubans have little interest in sponsoring a major campaign against the Chilean regime. [redacted]

Uruguay

14. Elsewhere, there is evidence of meager Cuban support for revolutionary groups opposing rightist military governments. During 1975-76 there were reportedly 500 members of the Uruguayan National Liberation Movement (MLN-Tupamaros) living in Cuba—most of whom had fled to Cuba after Allende's demise. [redacted]

[redacted] many of the Cuban-trained MLN members subsequently have gone to Europe, apparently using that continent as a staging area for further travel. We do not know their ultimate destination.

Bolivia

15. There has been little evidence of Cuban subversive actions against Bolivia since the Banzer regime took power in 1971. Some propaganda support has been provided the Bolivian National Liberation Army (ELN) since its resurrection from the Guevara debacle. Solid evidence of other assistance was nonexistent until this year [redacted]

Guatemala

16. In past years Guatemala was a major focal point for Cuban subversive efforts in the hemisphere. Its importance to Castro as a target was exceeded only by Venezuela and Bolivia prior to 1967. Cuban involvement with Guatemalan subversives began in 1962 and during the rest of the decade, Havana supplied the

Guatemalan rebels with considerable material assistance as well as training and guidance. The rebels were soundly thrashed by government security forces in the late 1960s and since 1970 Cuba has sharply reduced its assistance. Nevertheless, there is evidence of some Cuban support for both the Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR) and the Guatemalan Army of the Poor (EGP). The Cubans maintain contact with both groups through their diplomatic representatives [redacted]

[redacted] Havana has supplied both rebel groups with occasional financial aid and false documentation.

17. [redacted]

The Cubans apparently have not given either group arms or ammunition in recent years.

18. There have been no credible reports of Cuban personnel operating with the Guatemalan rebels since early 1971. The support given to the FAR and EGP has somewhat hindered Havana's efforts to establish close relations with the Guatemalan Communist Party. [redacted]

Argentina

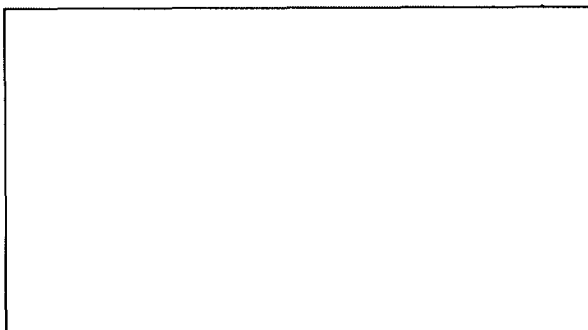
19. In Argentina, the Cubans used their diplomatic presence—at least until mid-1976—to maintain contact with several domestic terrorist groups as well as representatives of the Chilean MIR. [redacted]

[redacted] the Cubans met regularly with representatives of the Argentine People's Army (ERP) and the Montoneros during 1974-76. [redacted]

[redacted] the Cubans provided funds and propaganda guidance for newspapers published by the Revolutionary Worker's Party, the political arm of the ERP. [redacted]

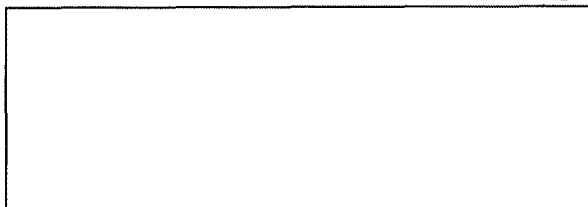
20. The Cubans, however, may have reduced or suspended their contacts with Argentine subversives since mid-1976. [redacted]

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Puerto Rico

21. In the Caribbean, Havana has provided support for proindependence groups in Puerto Rico; independence for the island has been a major Cuban propaganda theme since the early 1960s. The Puerto Rican Socialist Party (PSP), the largest of the proindependence groups, maintains a permanent representative in Havana. The Cubans have provided the PSP with extensive propaganda support, some financial assistance, and a limited amount of training.



The Current Picture: Africa and the Middle East

22. Havana's failures in Africa in the late 1960s prompted Castro to shift tactics in this region also. From 1971 to 1975 activities in the Middle East and Africa were oriented toward establishing political and economic ties with "progressive" governments. Small numbers of Cuban economic, and occasionally military, advisers were dispatched to assist with the problems of underdevelopment. Cuba simultaneously continued its support for the liberation movements operating against the Portuguese colonies and some of the Palestinian terrorist groups.

Angola, Mozambique, and Namibia

23. Cuba's sudden military intervention in Angola in 1975 dramatically accelerated Havana's African involvement. This massive buildup of forces in Angola was followed by modest increases in the number of advisers assisting other governments in the region;

while the primary emphasis is still aimed at aiding legitimate governments, guerrilla groups have not been foreseen. Support for the insurgents operating against the white minority governments of Rhodesia and Namibia has increased sharply. There are probably a few hundred Cuban military personnel in Mozambique, some of whom are reported to be training and assisting the Zimbabwe People's Army.

[] The Cubans have been involved in providing weapons and ammunition to Mozambique for delivery to the Rhodesian insurgents. This material reportedly is flown in occasionally from Angola. The most recent shipment occurred in mid-February. The Cubans apparently are giving some assistance to Joshua Nkomo's Zimbabwe African People's Union which has set up a guerrilla training camp in Angola. The Cubans may have provided some training and logistics support for the Katangans who invaded Zaire. There is no credible evidence, however, that any Cubans accompanied the insurgents into Zaire.

24. Havana sharply increased its aid to the South-West African People's Organization (SWAPO) following the visit of its leader, Sam Nujoma, to Cuba in October 1976.



The SWAPO guerrillas have been cooperating with a joint Angolan-Cuban offensive against Jonas Savimbi's insurgent National Union forces still active in southern Angola. SWAPO will not be able to threaten Namibia until a secure base has been established in Angola.

Palestinians

25. The Cubans have been providing limited support to several Palestinian nationalist groups at least since the early 1970s and perhaps as early as 1966. This aid reportedly includes military and political training as well as propaganda support for the Palestinian cause. Although the majority of Cuba's assistance goes to Yasir Arafat's Fatah, the Cubans reportedly have also aided the Popular Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PDFLP) and the more radical Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine.

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26. The Palestine Liberation Organization, which serves as an umbrella organization for most Palestinian commando groups, established a permanent office in Havana in 1974. The Castro regime maintains direct contact with the various commando organizations [redacted]

[redacted] Fidel Castro has met with Arafat on several occasions, most recently in Moscow on 6 April. Nayif Hawatmah, leader of the PDFLP, visited Cuba last January [redacted]
[redacted]

Western Sahara

27. There have been several reports that the Cuban government has provided training and logistics support for the Algerian-backed Polisario movement which seeks independence for the Western Sahara. The area, formerly the colony of Spain, was partitioned by Morocco and Mauritania in 1976. The presence of Cubans has not been confirmed, but we cannot rule out the possibility that a token number may be involved in guerrilla training within Algeria. President Boumediene's strong nonaligned position and Algeria's capability to provide effective training would tend to rule out any more than symbolic Cuban assistance.

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